



THE EYE SHIELD

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ALL CHANGE, PLEASE!

By Liam Callaghan

Part 2 of 3

Series 5 (1991):

There's no mistaking the changes here! Without a shadow of a doubt, this series made the biggest changes to the format of all.

Gone were the days of moral ambiguity among characters - there was a clear dividing line between the Powers That Be and the Opposition, headed by Treguard and Lord Fear respectively. The concept of this was a huge shake-up of the series' format, but not to the actual game-play as such. There were always villains in Knightmare; Lord Fear merely made it that bit more formal. And memorable. I must confess, I didn't remember Mogdred when I watched Knightmare through adult eyes for the first time in thirteen years, but if anyone tells you they don't remember Lord Fear, you should take them to a doctor and get their head examined. This is one change that could so easily have been for the worse, but Mark Knight's performance made it work, and work brilliantly.

With Lord Fear came his henchmen, most memorably Skarkill, the Goblin Master, who bagged himself a victim in this series, and Sylvester Hands, who caught a "dungie-person" in the next. Also, this series saw the first interaction between male and female lead villains - in the form of Lord Fear and Aesandre, played by Juliet Henry-Massy, who - doubling up as Gwendoline - was a straight replacement for Samantha Perkins and, I might add, an improvement. Aesandre is the most menacing female arch-villain after Morghanna for sure, and Gwendoline a worthy successor to Velda in the "warrior women" stakes.

One casualty of the changing format was Merlin, one of the most important characters from the early years. After being a shadow of his former self in series 4, his exit from the series wasn't that much of a bad thing, but it does raise the issue of how much effect the change in director had on the series. If Sally Freeman had reigned over series 4-8, would Merlin have paled like this? Probably not. Certainly, I doubt a lot of the game-play changes here would have happened.

The other notable change on the character front was that of Hordriss. He didn't formally align himself with the Powers That Be until late in series 6, but he was certainly a lot less menacing, becoming instead more pompous. To be fair, Hordriss was a powerful wizard, and he knew it, so a little pomposity here and there was not out of place, but it's still a far cry from series 3, where you knew that one wrong move and he would put an instant end to your quest. A wrong move here, and all he would do

was probably storm off in a huff.

Of course, no discussion of the series 5 character changes would be complete without a mention of Smirkenorff, the dragon, who made his debut right at the beginning of the first quest, flying Catherine into level one. This was his usual role in the series, although he was occasionally used to get from one level to the next (along with the Descender, also introduced in this series) which became his main function in subsequent series. Starting with series 6, he would be voiced by Clifford Norgate, but in this series he was silent (although this silence was more than countered by the noisome Elita, who sometimes negotiated his fare). The silence gave him more mystery, although it was unclear at first why he consented to fly dungeoneers on his back all the time. At least in the case of Christopher, the flight was earned by the correct answer of three riddles!

And on the subject of riddles, what happened to them? They weren't completely removed, but they were much less frequent, with only about half the teams having to answer any (and even then it was sometimes only one). Gone were the wall monsters, replaced by blockers, who just wanted a password. Although let it not be forgotten that on one memorable occasion, a blocker did devour a dungeoneer who didn't have the password - no team ever scored zero with a wall monster (insert gripe of your choice about Akash here).

Instead of the riddles, then, the teams picked up their information from the spyglasses and scrolls, which both made their debut in this season. In the case of the scrolls, in this series they didn't give that much away - initially, they were more hints rather than direct clues. Not so the spyglass - that was devised as a means to make the eye shield more useful. And it certainly was useful to the dungeoneers, as it enabled them to listen in on Lord Fear, plotting with his minions, and telling them various bits of information they might need - usually either a password or a causeway code. So instead of earning the information by getting enough riddles correct, they would learn what they needed to know for free.

Which brings me on to the causeways. Loved by some, loathed by others, these floor puzzles were the main obstacles to overcome. In this series, they had all different types - defence/aggression, the colour code (always the same), the elements and scissors-paper-stone. Sometimes the teams would have to learn the code in advance, but on other occasions, the code would be up on the screen for them when they reached the chamber - which is just plain wrong. Now, I'm not having a go at the causeways themselves here - anyone who's played my Ultimate Quest game (in the 'Downloads' section of this site) will know that I rate them

as an excellent challenge. But if you're going to cross them, the safe path should be discovered in return for some knowledge or favour, not printed on the screen above the exit!

One change that was a definite improvement lay at the end of the quest - once a team had retrieved the object in the past, that was it. The actual quest object is still not as important as it was in series 2-3, but starting with this series, once the Shield or whatever had been found, the teams would have to actually get themselves out of the Dungeon. Now, all right, there was never any real danger of them failing to get home once they had the object, but it did add a touch of drama to it, especially in this series, as the winning dungeoneer had to negotiate a causeway to get to the object in the first place, and another to get back to Nightmare Castle with it. Similarly, with the end of the series, instead of just having the quest suddenly come to an abrupt end, starting with this series the final team would have to achieve some little task to get back home and save the Dungeon. Okay, so it's not the same as getting to complete the quest, but it does ensure you get out of the Dungeon alive!

Without a doubt, this was the biggest overhaul of the series, and overall, I think they just about got away with it. There were enough good changes to make the bad changes more palatable. But the first seeds of decay had definitely been planted, and it wasn't long before the rot began to set in...

Series 6 (1992):

What the...? I know the previous series made the biggest changes to the game-play, but the sheer scope of the visual changes in this series is too much. The new title sequence gives you the first idea that this is not the same Nightmare we know and love. Gone is the old animation, the music has been redone, and not for the better this time. I remember reading something about the age of the target audience dropping; this certainly reflects it.

The title sequence is not the only beloved symbol of Nightmare that has been tinkered with for this series. The famous life force sequence of the head has also been dispensed with, to be replaced by the skeleton in the suit of armour. To be fair, at least the new life force sequence still works, and if it had been there from the very beginning, I doubt we would have had any issue with it. But, fine though it is in itself, it is a replacement for something much better. The green-amber-red life force status is such an iconic image of Nightmare, that to get rid of it amounts to sacrilege.

Fundamentally, there's no real *difference* in the game-play from the previous series. There's the odd redesigned chamber, but that's all. But the changes made in the previous series are accentuated here - the scrolls are now telling you precisely what to take, and the spyglasses are revealing more information than before. There's even fewer riddles (grrr!) and more emphasis on the causeways. While number sequences are arguably not as exciting as the variety of symbols we had in series 5, we at least have a timer on them now - doubtless a response to the viewers' reactions to Alex's demise in the previous series, in which Treguard blamed their demise on not being quick enough on the causeway. Nobody ever said anything about a time limit on this puzzle before, so they made a point of setting up the timer more officially for this series, which I say is fair enough. Certainly, Alan and his advisors couldn't argue with their fate!

The major difference within the Dungeon itself is in the characters. Possibly because of the spyglass sequences, this series is almost more about the characters than the teams. The teams had to understand the character politics a lot more this series, particularly the almost soap opera-like relations between Lord Fear and Greystagg.

Speaking of Greystagg, the introduction of the Grey Sisters is a good move, because it does create some level of moral ambiguity, as the witches are relatively neutral, and will only help you if they get something in return. Much the same can be said of Captain Nemanor. Okay, so they're not quite as unpredictable as Hordriss was in series 3, but it's something I guess.

One change that is definitely for the better is the Place of Choice. Absent from the previous series, it's back, but this time the teams get to choose from all four quest objects... even after the Crown was retrieved - my only niggle with it, in fact. In the previous series, once Ben had retrieved the Shield, Treguard crossed it off the list when giving the teams the choice of what to quest for, but here, there was no adjustment made to the floor. Oh well, it's only a little thing.

Overall, then? Not good. The changes to the game-play are really just extensions of the changes made in the previous series, and if they'd retained all the old symbolism of the show, they might have got away with it. But the animation of the title sequence and the life force graphics have been there since day one, and to change these is bang out of order. They'll be getting rid of the Helmet of Justice next...

REMEMBER THIS?

Series 4. Level 2.

ARIADNE'S LAIR

Having Ariadne as the biggest threat of level two - the threat that all the earlier events of the level have been preparing for and leading up to, and which guarantees an appearance on level three if completed successfully - is one of the many aspects of series 4 that I do enjoy quite a lot. Such a huge and scary creature as Ariadne certainly deserved such an important role in the quest, and this was a good development for her after making several very nice appearances in series 2, but then being reduced to one appearance (at the absolute most!) in series 3. And Ariadne's series 4 appearances really did make or break the teams' quests during the crucial closing stages of level two - her lair in Dunkley Wood would either provide the necessary fare for the boat ride to level three, as well as the portal to the Dunswater itself, or the dungeoneer would die there, between Ariadne's giant, poisonous jaws.

I give Ariadne's lair ten out of ten for atmosphere, although it does have a couple of technical problems. Early in the series (with Helen and Alistair) the production team continually placed the object-bearing tree stump far too close to the door, meaning that when Ariadne started crawling in from the bottom of the screen, it actually looked like a much better idea to dash for the nearby exit rather than hang around and cast a spell whilst waiting for the giant spider to crawl all the way across the web. By the end of the series (when Giles entered Ariadne's lair) this issue had been sorted out, with the tree stump being placed in the bottom left corner of the screen, and Ariadne crawling in from the right, thus making some kind of attempt to block her potential prey's exit.

There is also the issue of fairness. As Ariadne's lair was the culmination of the level two challenges, magic was always required (ostensibly, anyway) to exit safely, as Nicky found out to her cost when she failed to gain a spell from Merlin. So why was Dickon handed a free ticket through, not even taking part in a quick chat with Brother Mace or Mellie in exchange for a Joker card, as Simon, Jeremy and Giles did? Obviously the production team was desperate to hurry through a winning team, but Dickon and friends could have coped with a more challenging quest, if they'd been given the chance!

PUZZLE PAGE

Lego Nightmare IV

There have always been two great passions in my life - Nightmare is one, and Lego is the other. My extensive Lego collection dates from 1979 to the present day, and I have used a few carefully selected pieces and minifigures to recreate some scenes from Nightmare, thus combining my two passions! Unfortunately, the pictures were taken with a disposable camera of doubtful quality and are very blurry, but I'm sure you'll get the basic idea!

Which dungeoneer is talking to Merlin?

- a) Simon I
- b) Julian
- c) Chris II
- d) Nicky



Answer: c)

EASTERN PROMISE

By Rosey Collins

Part 2 of 3

Ships and boats were moored against the backdrop of a blood red sunset, and the woman from the tavern was sitting cross-legged on a wooden cargo box. When she saw Nemanor, she jumped to her feet.

"I thought you'd vanished," he said.

"I did."

"I didn't expect to see you again. Who are you? Why were those monsters after you?"

She shrugged. "I must have annoyed them."

"You annoy me." He walked away from her, towards the *Atabia*.

"Wait." She fell into step beside him. "Did you kill them?"

"One of them."

"And the others?"

"I don't know," said Nemanor. "They were..."

"Ah, say no more. It's a sensitive subject for you, that man and his exploits."

"Who are you?" Nemanor asked again, turning on her angrily. "Do you have a name?"

"Yes," she said, "one or two. You may call me Daughter of the Setting Moon, whose Eyes are like Daggers in the Hearts of Men who Ride the Great Caravan of the Sultan."

Nemanor frowned. "Is that supposed to be funny?"

She stuck out her bottom lip. "No. It's my name."

"I don't have time for you." He turned back towards his ship.

"Wait," she said. "You don't want to leave just yet. The question you should be asking isn't who I am, but *what* I am."

Nemanor paused for a moment, then decided to ignore her. He boarded the *Atabia*, and found it deserted. The ship was not due to set sail for two more days, but there was nowhere else Nemanor wanted to be. He went down to his cabin, and found the Daughter of the Setting Moon lying on his bunk. He stared in surprise, and then scowled.

"All right," he said, "you win. *What* are you?"

"I am a genie."

Nemanor raised his eyebrows, his interest piqued. "Really?"

"Ah." She jumped down from the bunk and stood in front of him, her eyes level with his chest. She looked up. "I have your attention. You know what genies can do, yes?"

"Anything they like, as far as I understand it. But you're not going

to do anything for me, are you? I know the stories. Genies grant wishes to those who release them from rings and bottles and lamps and such."

"You saved my life," the genie said.

"Did I really?"

"Quite possibly. At any rate, you helped me, so now I want to do something for you. Come now. What do you want most in the world?"

"Well," said Nemanor, "there is something that all seafaring men desire. It is an astrolabe. It measures - "

"Wait," said the genie. "That's what you want most? A mere object?"

"Every sailor desires it," said Nemanor, "and if I could get it..."

"Ah, yes, I see," said the genie. "If you could get it, Sinbad could not. It has eluded him too - is that right?"

"I wasn't thinking of him."

"You're always thinking of him. You can't lie to me - I am a genie. All right, First Mate Nemanor, just suppose I got you this astrolabe. What then? Would it get you off this fishing boat? Would it make you a captain? What would you say if someone asked how you got it? 'I sent a genie after it'? Hardly the stuff legends are made of."

"You can't get it," said Nemanor, "can you?"

She scowled. "Of course I can. But isn't there something you want more? Let's dig a little deeper. There is a reason why you want to be the one to find that... whatever it is. You want to be a captain. You want to command a legendary ship. In short, you want to rival Sinbad."

"I am a sailor," said Nemanor. "Of course I would wish to captain a ship of legend. What man wouldn't, who loves the sea as I do?"

"Well," said the genie, "*you* were lucky enough to meet a genie, and I know such a ship. I can make you captain, if you wish it. *Do* you wish it, First Mate?"

Nemanor hesitated. It sounded too good to be true, but he could not simply let the opportunity pass.

"Not yet," said Nemanor. "Show me."

"Very well."

A slow smile spread across the genie's face as the cabin melted away around them. Suddenly Nemanor found himself in the open, surrounded by ocean and salty air. He turned away from the genie and looked around him. At one glance, he was smitten.

"She's beautiful," he said.

"She can be yours."

"What manner of ship is this? What is her name?"

"It is a ship of legend," said the genie, "as I told you. Its name is

the *Cloud Walker*."

Nemanor turned back to face her. "Can she fly?"

"I don't know," said the genie. "If you were captain, perhaps you could find out."

"I don't understand," said Nemanor. "Why are you so keen for me to captain this ship?"

"Because you helped me," said the genie, "and I want to grant your dearest wish. Come now, Nemanor. Are you going to go back to that fishing boat, and be a mere first mate? Even if you ever did make captain, you would still be catching the snakeheads and the arowanas."

Nemanor felt his resolve beginning to weaken. "I..."

"Tomorrow a child will be born," said the genie, "and she will grow to be a great storyteller. Her tales will go down in history. I shall tell her of Captain Nemanor and the *Cloud Walker*. You only have to agree. Do you wish to be Captain Nemanor?"

"Yes," he said. "I - "

"Done!" The genie raised her arms, threw back her head and then let out a sigh. "Finally! Now I must be going. Farewell."

"Wait!"

She waited.

"Where are we?" he said. "Where is this ship going? And..." He looked around him. "Where is my crew?"

"You have no crew," said the genie.

Nemanor's eyes widened. "No crew? What's the point of captaining a ship with -?"

"Oh, stop complaining. It's a ship of legend, like I keep telling you. Isn't that what you wanted?"

Nemanor was furious, with her but also with himself. Part of him had known all along that this was a trick of some kind, and yet he had allowed himself to be seduced. With a calmness he was far from feeling, he asked, "What is so legendary about this ship?"

"Well," said the genie, "it might be a little bit... sort of... cursed."

"What?"

"Never to find land."

"But that's insane! What about me? What about my quest?"

"You will just have to forget about that."

"But if Sinbad should find the astrolabe first..."

"Let him," said the genie. "Your story is already greater than his. Your ship is cursed never to find land, and you..." She raised her hand, and stared into Nemanor's eyes. "You are cursed never to leave it."

With that, she ran for the starboard bulwark and dived over the

edge, all in the time it took Nemanor to digest this information. Then he too ran to the bulwark and tried to jump in after her, but found that he could not.

"What have you done to me?" he cried.

The genie's head rose above the surface of the water, followed by the rest of her, until she was floating just above the surface.

"I am truly sorry," she said, "but I had to. This ship must have a captain, and some very bad spirits were very angry with me because... well, I killed the original captain."

Though it was hardly the most pressing matter on his mind, Nemanor could not help but ask, "Why?"

The genie shrugged. "He made me angry."

"Is that why the rocs were after you?"

"No. That was something else." The genie glanced up at the sky, and then said hastily, "I am sorry. I must go. Don't worry, Captain Nemanor. I'll tell her about you."

"Who?"

"The child, Scheherazade. She will tell your tale. One day, your story will be told in the Thousand and Two Arabian Nights. Goodbye, and good luck!"

With that, she disappeared in a plume of golden smoke. Nemanor had barely a moment to stare at where she had been before a shadow fell over the *Cloud Walker*. Turning, Nemanor found himself staring into the large yellow eyes of a Chinese dragon.

"The genie," the dragon hissed. "The Daughter of the Setting Moon. Where is she?"

"I wish I knew," said Nemanor.

"She has wronged you too?"

"Yes. She has put a terrible curse upon me. May I ask what she did to you?"

"She promised me something," said the dragon, as it turned back towards the setting sun. "And she broke her promise."

CLASSIC QUEST

Series 2

Quest: The Sword of Justice.

Dungeoneer: Martin I.

Advisors: John, Lee and Tony.

Home town: Sunderland, Tyne and Wear.

Team score: 2 out of 10.

The first quest of series 2 was undoubtedly short, although not necessarily sweet.

Level One: Martin kicks off the trend for this series by pulling the lever at the Wheel of Fate as his first task, before arriving in the familiar four-door starting chamber. Folly and Gretel immediately rush in, apparently in the middle of a silly and noisy game, but Gretel promptly becomes bored and runs off. Folly then subjects Martin to some of his usual prattle (*"You look much more fun to play with than Gretel!"* - **Folly**) and invites him to join in with the game, which is apparently called 'Chase the Lady'. The advisors manage to work out that this means Martin should use the door through which Gretel has already exited. Martin reaches the clue room, where Olgarth is on guard (for the first time since the second episode of series 1) and the team scores two correct riddle answers. Somewhat unfairly, the only information Olgarth reveals is that the password is the maiden's name, leaving the team completely in the dark about which objects they should take. There is a bottle of toads' legs on the table, which they don't bother to examine and so leave behind, but even so, I always think they should have had a piece of object information for their score of two truths, just like every other team to achieve that score!

Martin next arrives on a rocky ledge, where Gumboil is on guard and demands the password. The advisors manage to remember the maiden's name - Gretel, just in case you didn't know - and so Gumboil allows Martin to pass. Mildread's cave follows. Mildread uses one of the advisors' voices to entice Martin to step into her cauldron (which she has disguised as a wellway) but Treguard promptly puts a stop to the witch's shenanigans. However, without the toads' legs, the team has nothing to give Mildread in order to earn her help (*"You've got nothing to offer me and I've got nothing to offer you!"* - **Mildread**) and Martin is forced to dash from the room with demented cackling ringing in his ears. A bomb room follows, and

as the team is now in losing status, Martin promptly gets blown up!

Summary: They obviously weren't much cop, but this team fell victim to a tough new rule with their wall monster information, so perhaps the quest was cut short slightly prematurely.

READ ALL ABOUT IT – EXTRAS, EXTRAS!

As well as all the main Knightmare actors, there were many uncredited extras who played their parts in bringing the show to life, particularly as the quest moved out of the confines of the Dungeon and into a wider fantasy world, which obviously needed to be populated in some places! This is a shout-out to those unsung heroes of Knightmare – the actors who did so much to make the show so good, but received no credit at the time for their work.

Series 3:

Respect goes out to the two petite actors (I remember reading somewhere that they were actually two diminutive dancers) who played the goblins, always using body language and movement so effectively to bring the creatures to life, and of course they stuck with the show throughout Series 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 (maybe they also played the cavernwights in Series 1 and 2 – someone small certainly did!) and continued to do such a lot to bring Knightmare to life. (I don't know whether or not it was actually the same two dancers all the way through, but I find it appealing to think so.) After he made himself known on the website some time ago, we were all able to thank prominent extra Bryan McNerny by name for his great work as Mr Grimwold, as well as (we assume) the Armoured Behemoth. And what about all those elves that can be seen wandering across the Vale of Vanburn? They did such an important job, showing how the world of Knightmare was reaching out to touch other fantasy realms.

Series 4:

Whoever played that bearded ogre did some great roaring, and the person (apparently a woman, by the look of it) in the assassin costume helped to add a lot of nice tension to this series. The numerous Crazy Heifer patrons (and staff, of course, in the form of Mollie and Millie) did such a lot to bring the tavern to life, and they continued to do so in Series 5, 6 and 7.

Series 5:

The Wolfenden villagers did so much in this series (as well as Series 6) to bring the medieval market village to life, buying from the traders or simply going about their daily business in the streets. Of particular note here is the speaking extra who played a character widely known as "Flower Girl" during Richard's quest, and who (I very much suspect) had

another speaking part in Duncan's quest, using a different accent. Apparently that flower seller has been the subject of much forum discussion in the past - could she be Mrs Scaramonger, or even one of the so-called "little" Scaramongers? - so she certainly played her part in making Knightmare that significant bit more interesting for the fans.

Series 6:

The woman who played Peggatty did so much work to bring Witch Haven to life, particularly with her brilliant cackling, while another extra (or maybe the same one with a hood over her face) played the witch that was hanging around with Greystagg at the very end of the series. And let's not forget Young Grimwold, who put in an excellent performance as a lumbering ogre, and did an excellent job of appearing depressed about his ugliness when he reappeared as one of Rothberry's customers in Series 7. And what about all those aspiring sorcerers' apprentices? Sofia would probably have preferred it if they hadn't turned up, but Hordriss's school would have been nothing without them!

Series 7:

The man in brown shorts who played all the trolls (including Bulstrode) made a huge contribution to this series, while the Grimdale villagers and magic school students fleshed out a lot of great scenes.

Series 8:

The miremen were brought waddling to life by two dedicated extras, and there were plenty of traders and peasant-types to be seen at the docks of Marblehead - presumably they were Lord Fear's serfs!

And let's not forget Tim Child himself, with his memorable cameos as (possibly, but quite probably not) Series 3 Gargoyle, Series 7 Password Guard and Series 8 Linghorm Balcony Guard. To one and all of you, thanks for the memories!

CLASSIC QUEST

Series 6

Quest: The Crown.

Dungeoneer: Matt.

Advisors: Razer, Ben and John.

Home town: Bath.

Team score: 5½ out of 10.

What a posing, preening cock-of-the-walk Matt was, and what an annoying first dungeoneer of series 6 he made!

Level One: Matt becomes the first dungeoneer to step on the symbol of his quest in the Hall of Choice and take a stroll through a new-look dwarf tunnel, before he arrives at the small settlement of Holmgarth and enters the iron-age roundhouse, where a clue table awaits him. A lengthy spyglass sequence reveals the impressive scale of Lord Fear's spacious new Mount Fear home, as well as the fact that one of Skarkill's legs has been injured during an encounter with Tiny the hobgoblin. After concluding his conversation with Skarkill, Lord Fear shows off his new toy - Dreadnort - and (very unusually) freezes Matt where he stands. The team casts a spell called ESCAPE, which they have just gained from the clue scroll, and Matt picks up a bar of gold and a crossbow bolt before leaving the dwelling.

In Wolfenden High Street, Matt buys a dragon mint (as well as the password for level one) from Ah Wok, rejecting Julius Scaramonger's offer of an invisible (a.k.a. non-existent) sword. A brief encounter with a blocker and a haphazard stumble across a causeway lead to the metal gate at the end of level one, and Ridolfo is on hand to open it with the right key - in this case, a musical key, naturally! In return for this favour, Ridolfo asks Matt to tell him some news he can distribute around the Dungeon, and the details of the Dreadnort go down fairly well. Matt then becomes the first dungeoneer to converse with Smirkenorff, who is clearly not impressed with Matt's overconfident manner, but flies him to level two in exchange for the dragon mint nonetheless: *"Dragon mint, eh? Most... acceptable."* - **Smirkenorff**.

Level Two: A choice of clue objects awaits in an open courtyard, where Matt equips himself with a firestone and a bottle of Moondust. He then goes on to meet Motley and Sidriss, who are trying to invoke a brownie,

but Sidriss's magic is proving as erratic as ever. When a pooka appears by mistake, Matt donates his Moondust to help Motley get rid of the unfriendly creature, and Sidriss rewards him with the spell SAMUARI, which she is sure will work properly because it's one of Hordriss's. A spyglass awaits Matt on a bench in the next room, through which Lord Fear can be seen negotiating the terms of his proposed treaty with Greystagg. He sends his hand into the quest to chase Matt out of the room.

Matt is then accosted by Sylvester Hands, who quickly ties him up with his magic rope. The SAMUARI spell is cast and the spectral Japanese warrior appears, cowing Hands immediately. The team agrees to cancel the spell if Hands will help them, so he tells them the password for level two, and gives Matt a necklace of witch amber in exchange for the firestone. The password is required at once, as Dreadnort turns up... a bit of an anticlimax after all that build-up, finding out he's just a glorified blocker! The witch amber is then used to gain the favour of Heggatty, who has been having a few problems flying her broomstick. She transports Matt up to a high door, which is decorated with the symbol of the Crown, and he emerges onto another causeway. Here, at last, the advisors' guiding skills desert them, and Matt's loping swaggers carry him over the edge, to his doom.

Summary: Despite Matt's annoying, cocksure style, this team didn't do badly at all, but their slightly erratic guidance (coupled with Matt's haphazard swaggering) did for them in the end.

KIDS' TV SHOWS I GREW UP WITH

Focus on: Time Busters.

Original Broadcast Run: January 1993 - January 1995.

UK TV Channel: BBC2.

All three series of Time Busters aired on Sunday mornings on BBC2, popping up just after the New Year as a kind of après-ski to Nightmare. Why to Nightmare, specifically? Well, because both shows were produced by Broadsword, and many Nightmare actors turned up in Time Busters, including Mark Knight, Michael Cule and Samantha Perkins. For this reason alone, the show was worth watching, but there were other reasons to watch it too, if you could be bothered to get out of bed in time.

The premise went something like this - the evil Dr Paradox travelled to a different point in time each week and messed up an established timeline, which the show's youthful contestants (the Time Busters themselves) would have to put right in order to win the game. They travelled to the same time period as Dr Paradox on a big red London bus, under the watchful eye of the show's host, Professor McNulty, played by Michael Troughton. The first series saw two teams of Time Busters (one red, one yellow) competing against each other, one under the watchful eye of Professor McNulty himself, the other aided by his young, blond, female assistant, PJ.

Series 2 saw PJ replaced with a disembodied computer voice called Buster, and this time there was only one team per episode, which was a good alteration, I seem to remember. However, the third series took things a little too far, I recall. This time, Professor McNulty was gone and Buster had become the sole host of the show, talking to the teams as a weird CG face on a computer screen. How could they have let Michael Troughton go? Disgraceful!

Anyway, the basic task for the team(s) was the same in all three series - after watching a reconstructed scene to show them what trouble Dr Paradox was causing, the Time Busters went out into the world of the past to investigate. They interacted with the characters from the reconstruction (sometimes played by Nightmare actors) and followed clues in the hopes of finding Dr Paradox's time capsule, a kind of white tube thing that would apparently render all Paradox's meddling null and

void if the Time Busters managed to get it back to the bus on time!

And there must have been a time limit, I think. Sometimes it seemed that they had managed to find the time capsule with no problems, but Dr Paradox himself would be waiting for them and threaten to kill them if they didn't immediately run back to the bus without it! Obviously all the episodes were edited to fit into twenty-five minutes, but the reason for this apparently random failure at the final hurdle had to be time-based, surely!

What about some memorable moments? Well, there's only one that's really stuck with me over the past eighteen years, but it's a great one! This happened during the second series, and it was one of those times when it seemed like the team had got the time capsule, but Dr Paradox turned up and nicked it at the last moment. However, this one had a delightfully devious twist. The team had been following a series of clues on rolled-up bits of paper to find the time capsule - this is not something that always happened, I think it's worth saying, but it did that week. Dr Paradox turned up with his revolver and told the Time Busters to drop the time capsule and scarper, just like he often did. The male contestant was holding the time capsule in one hand, and all the rolled-up papers in the other hand. Rather brilliantly, he dropped the papers instead of the time capsule.

As he was standing a little way away, all Dr Paradox saw was a long cylindrical shape falling to the ground, so he let the team go, thinking that they had surrendered the time capsule. When he discovered he had been tricked, he was furious, but it was too late because the Time Busters were already back at the bus! Now, I'm sure your cynical side is thinking "Come on, that sounds like such a set-up!" but I actually think it was a genuine bit of brilliance on the part of that canny Time Buster because of Michael Troughton's reaction. When the clever contestant proudly handed the time capsule to Professor McNulty, he reacted by exclaiming "Oh, well done!" in a way that strongly suggested he had not been expecting to receive a time capsule that week.

Time Busters drew on many of the aspects that made Knightmare so brilliant - improvising with characters in a role-play scenario, and inviting its viewers to follow a team through an interactive adventure. In summary, then, it was good... but it was no Knightmare!

POETRY CORNER

As the seventh series entered its second half, this overly cocky and often unpleasant excuse for a dungeoneer tried to become the third Ben in a row to win Knightmare. He failed, fortunately.

From Salisbury, Wilts, came four young men,
Led by a cocky git named Ben.
Romahna gave them much advice,
Some keys freed Fidjit in a trice.
A mop revealed a spell of sight,
To help pay Smirky for his flight
By picking up a stone of fire
To keep at bay the dragon's ire.
In level two, a spell was split,
The team had soon to find each bit.
Ben freed a waitress from a chest,
Sly Hands was then denied his rest.
But then, with only C-I-D,
The team had trouble trying to see
Where their next letter could be found,
And failed to use the DARKNESS ground.
Without a hope, Ben fast was killed,
A giant troll the screen soon filled.
Ben's team had proved a bit too dumb,
That's why a spike went up his bum!

JAKE'S ART DESK

I drew these pictures during lunchtimes at secondary school when I was inside and bored. Yes, I should have taken the opportunity to catch up on some homework, but this was much more fun! These pictures aren't really any good, of course - I've always been rubbish at drawing! But they kept me amused and I'm rather fond of them. They were all done during the academic year 1996/1997, when I was in Year 9.



